

Armor-Stiner House
45 West Clinton Avenue
Irvington
Westchester County
New York

HABS No. NY-5620

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60-IRV
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ALL INFORMATION
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5620

ARMOUR-STINER HOUSE

Location: 45 West Clinton Avenue (SW corner of West Clinton Avenue and The Croton Aqueduct), Irvington, Westchester County, New York.

Present Owner: Elizabeth Black Carmer

Present Occupants: Elizabeth Black and Carl Lamson Carmer

Present Use: Dwelling

Statement of Significance: In addition to eclectically incorporating Gothic, Stick-style, Second Empire and Eastlake detail, this house is one of two domed octagonal residences built in the United States. Its siting, design, and heating-plumbing systems reflect the contemporary mid-nineteenth century architectural philosophies of Orson Squire Fowler, noted phrenologist, sexologist, amateur architect, and author of the popular Octagon House: a Home for All. Additionally, its situation near public transportation to New York City may well be related to George Woodward's ideas on suburban architecture.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1859-60. Although Paul J. Armour purchased this land in November of 1858, his home address was not listed as "Irvington" until 1860-61 (Trow, volumes 21-24, pp. 37-38). The November 2, 1860 deed transferral corroborates this.
2. Architect: Not Known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a complete chain of title to the land on which the house stands, namely lots 47 and 48 of the Lane and O'Brien Map of the village of Abbotsford from May 1, 1850 (Westchester County Land Records Office, Map 211). Except where noted, references are from the Westchester County Deed Books.

1858 Mortgages, Book 250, page 103. On November 9, (recorded November 15) Reid R. Throckmorton deeded the land to William S. Bird, a lawyer who represented Paul J. Armour for a mortgage of \$5,000 at 7% annum.

1860 Book 447, page 163. Paul J. Armour resold title to Rebecca Armour on November 2 (recorded November 15) for

\$12,000.

- 1872 Book 807, page 425. Rebecca Armour sold the house to Joseph Stiner for \$27,000 on May 31 (recorded June 4).
- 1882 Book 1003, page 428. Susie H. Dibble bought this site for \$22,850 from Joseph Stiner on January 3 (recorded January 10).
- 1893 Bien's Atlas of Westchester County (plate 21) still lists this as the George W. Dibble Estate. It was subsequently inherited by Dibble's daughter, Mabel E. D. Taylor.
- 1902 Book 1615, page 121. Mabel E. D. Taylor transferred the house to Delia S. Clarke for the sum of \$1 on May 28 (recorded May 29).
- 1911 Bromley's Atlas of Westchester County (plate 11) still lists this property as belonging to Delia S. Clarke. Sometime after 1911, it was bequeathed to Summer R. Stone.
- 1933 Book 3352, page 351. Mr. Stone then willed the house to Mary S. Stone, Elizabeth B. Stone and Caroline Phraner. On December 18 (recorded December 20) these three sold it to Ethan Brand for \$15,000.
- 1940 Book 3806, page 241. On January 17 (recorded January 19) the New York Lien Corporation acquired this land from William R. Hogan Brand's referee, for \$250.
- 1941 Book 3902, page 96. John P. Cunningham received title from the New York Lien Corporation for \$10 on March 31 (recorded April 2).
- 1946 Book 4377, page 230. Cunningham sold the house and grounds to Carl Carmer for \$8,500 on May 1 (recorded May 3).
- 1960 Book 6010, page 96. Mr. Carmer deeded these claims to his wife, Elizabeth B. Carmer on March 31 for \$10 (recorded May 12).
4. Original plans, construction, etc. None known. As it was first built, the house is supposed to have only been two stories high having undecorated sides (Hammel, p. 14) and a lantern atop a flat or mansard roof (Tarrytown Daily News, 1965, p. 3). However, it is difficult to imagine it without some type of veranda or porch since most entrances are well above ground level. Additionally, floorboard similarities

on the second and third levels indicates that the latter always had an inhabitable space, and hence, possibly had a mansard roof.

5. Alterations and additions: After Joseph Stiner purchased the house in 1872, he apparently added the dome, cupola, stick-style facade trim, and veranda, the last of which purportedly cost \$26,000 (Lancaster, p. 141). Stiner was also responsible for adding a bay window extension to the living room, which may have been inspired by a similar spatial projection on an octagonal house published in Bullock's 1854 American Cottage Builder (pl. facing p. 319). These alterations were probably made about 1876. The series of guidebooks to landmarks along the Hudson River distributed by the Hudson Day Line does not mention the prominent dome in the 1875 edition, but does include a reference to it in 1878. Further corroboration of the mid 1870s date can be found in the additions themselves, whose moldings, staircase newels and floor boards are of different proportions and dimensions than those on the first and second floors. Etched glass containing the monogram "JS" at the entrance to the North room on the third floor reinforces this attribution. So do the Eastlake style details within that glass and in the sinkback found in the north room since the first American edition of Eastlake's Hints of Household Tastes was not published until 1872.

Although the architect of those alterations remains unknown, one Irvington octogenarian, Mary Huston, claims that her carpenter father Bernard Huston helped construct them. Inspection of the Westchester County Directories (1860-70) reveals no listing for a Bernard Huston. However, an "Alexander Huston-Carpenter" is listed as living in nearby Sing Sing in 1868-70 (Curtin, p. 83 and p. 194, respectively). He may well be related to or confused with Bernard Huston, and was possibly an employee of one of four Irvington builders (Curtin, 1870, p. 355).

An excellent idea of what all the c. 1876 additions were, can be obtained from a late nineteenth century photograph of the house now in the New York Historical Society (negative 53386). It depicts several features which are no longer extant, such as iron filigree work in the capped chimney and dome dormers, elaborate rococco styled brackets flanking each of those dormers, urns atop the veranda railing, exterior window shutters, symmetrically placed coachman's lanterns at the base of both spiral staircases, and a much more pronounced color scheme showing greater contrast between light and darkly painted areas.

In honor of the house's centennial, Carl Carmer restored the exterior in 1959, including the slate roofed dome, (Tarrytown Daily News, 1959, p. 40).

6. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure: Contrary to recent references (Fowler-Stern, fig. 9; Graff, p. 87), neither Philip D. Armour or any of his immediate

relations ever owned this house. The future meatpacking magnate left Ogdensburg, N. Y. in 1854 for Milwaukee and then Chicago (New York Times, 1901, p. 1). The two Armours connected with the house, Paul and Paul J. were metropolitan New York Financiers. (Trow, 1845-75). Its next owner and modifier, Joseph Stiner, was a New York City tea importer (Trow, 1873, p. 1258). His occupation may have prompted him to incorporate supposedly oriental imagery in those additions, namely dome, veranda and landscaping (Carmer, Westchester Historian, p. 75; Graff, p. 87-88; Lancaster, p. 27). Among its many residents after Stiner were Ethan Brand, professor of Biochemistry and authority on amino acids (New York Times, 1953, p. 27), Aleko E. Lilius, Finnish explorer and author (Tarrytown Daily News, Sept. 30, 1965, p. 3), and finally Carl Carmer, a one-time college professor, newspaper reporter, magazine editor and author of thirty-five books and numerous articles. It was during his ownership in 1951 that the Westchester County Historical Society sponsored a tour here for 300 people. Unfortunately, the unnerving police sirens frightened the neighbors and the combined weight of the visitors cracked the ceilings, (The New York Times, 1951, p. 33). In conjunction with Life magazine's October 17, 1955 feature on the "Romantic Decades", a Victorian Costume party was held (98).

B. Sources of Information:

1. Primary Sources:

Deed and Mortgage Books, found in the Westchester County Courthouse, Land Records Office, White Plains.

Map Files, found in the Westchester County Courthouse, Land Records Office, White Plains.

Map 211-Lane and O'Brien, Map of the Village of Abbotsford (May 1, 1850).

Map 5341-Ward Carpenter, Survey of Property Prepared for the Estate of Delia S. Clarke. . . . (Nov. 27, 1933).

Atlases, which supplemented information existing in Deeds and Surveys.

Bien, Joseph R., Atlas of Westchester County.
New York: Bien and Co., 1893.

Bromley, G.W. and W.S. Atlas of Westchester
New York: Bromley, 1911.

Directories were useful in determining addresses and biographical information on various owners of the house, and also for verifying the existence of one of its probable carpenters. These are:

Curtin's Westchester County Directory. 1868-69:
1869-70.

Gospill's Westchester County Directory. 1866.

Hutchinson's Westchester County Directory. 1860-61.

Trow's New York City Directories. 1845-1934.

Pattern Books served to isolate contemporary nineteenth century influences on this house. The ones utilized were:

Bullock, John. The American Cottage Builder.
New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1854.
Pages 239-41 and plates facing pages 317, 319
contain an octagon house of modest size designed
by William H. Willcox. The bay window living
room addition in the Armour-Stiner house may
have been inspired by a similar projection in
Willcox's first floor plan.

Fowler, Orson Squire. The Octagon House: a Home
for All. New York, 1853; reprinted with an
introduction by Madeline B. Stern. New York:
Dover, 1973. More than influencing the design,
siting and heating-plumbing systems of this
house, it inspired the construction of numerous
octagonal residences throughout New York State
and the nation.

Woodward, George F. and F.W. Woodward's Country Homes.
New York: Woodward, 1865. The building of this
octagon house near vertical transportation axes
leading to nearby New York City reflects similar
concepts of suburbia found in pp. 11-15 of this
work.

Old View. The Country Residence of Mr. George W.
Dibble at Dobbs Ferry, Print Room of the New
York Historical Society (negative 53386) is
the only known late nineteenth century photo-
graph of the house.

Interview. A telephone interview was held with Mary
Huston on February 4, 1975 at 2:00 p.m. in
order to confirm rumors that her father,
Bernard Huston, helped build the house.

2. Secondary Sources:

- Carmer, Carl. "Aromas from Another World," The Westchester Historian XLIII no. 4 (Fall, 1967), 74-76.
- _____. "Fowler was Right or Notes from the Heart of an Octagon Dweller," New York History (April, 1952), 211.
- _____. "The Fowlers: Practical Phrenologists." The New Yorker, February 13, 1967, pp. 22-27.
- _____. "The Octagonal Mode," Town and Country XCIV, April, 1939, pp. 4-7.
- Graff, Polly Ann and Stewart, eds. Wolfert's Roost: a Portrait of a Village, Irvington: Washington Irving Press, 1971.
- Hammel, Lisa. "An Octagon House with Two Ghosts--And one Smells Flowers," New York Times, January 2, 1967, p. 14.
- Lancaster, Clay. Architectural Follies in America. Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1960.
- Life, "The Romantic Decades," October 17, 1955, p. 98.
- Link, William. The Hudson By Daylight. New York: William Link, 1878. (Guide book distributed by the Hudson Day Line Company.)
- McQuill, Thursty. The Hudson By Daylight. New York: Anderson, 1875. (Guide book distributed by the Hudson Day Line Co.).
- New York Evening Post, "Obituary for Paul Armour," July 20, 1866, p. 3.
- New York Times, "Obituary for Philip D. Armour," June 7, 1901, p. 1.
- _____. "Obituary, Dr. Ethan Brand," July 14, 1953, p. 27.
- _____. "Octagon House: Blend of Americana and Orientalism," May 22, 1951, p. 33.
- Rounds, Ruby M. "Octagon Buildings - Part II," New York History, July, 1952, p. 330.
- Santora, Phil. "Sage of the Hudson," Westchester Daily News, September 19, 1972.
- Schmidt, Carl. The Octagon Fad. Scottsville, N.Y.: by the author, 1958.
- Tarrytown Daily News, "Carmer Restores Octagon House," July 21, 1959, p. 40.
- _____, "Octagon House: Carmer's Is Elaborate," September 30, 1965, p. 3.

Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969.

C. Facilities Utilized for Research:

Irvington, Historical Society and Public Library.

New York City, Avery Architectural Library at Columbia University.
New York Historical Society.

New York Public Library, Research Library at
42nd Street--the Art and Architecture, Local
History and Genealogy, American History,
and Prints and Drawings Divisions.

Tarrytown, Historical Society of the Tarrytowns.
Public Library.
Sleepy Hollow Restorations.

Tuckahoe, Westchester County Historical Society.

D. Possible Source of Information not yet investigated:

Yonkers Public Library, which contains microfilms of Yonkers newspapers back to the 1860's.

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Interest: This is one of two-domed octagonal houses built in North America. In addition to being visually unique, it is eclectically representative of several nineteenth century styles.

2. Condition of fabric: fair to poor; deteriorating.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The house is 14.76 meters (50 feet) in diameter. Each face of the octagonal core measures

6.10 meters (20 feet) while each veranda side is 9.15 meters (30 feet). The two-story core is original while the two-story dome cupola, as well as the veranda were added in c. 1876.

2. Foundations: large irregular masonry blocks to ground level. Foundations from there to the underside of veranda consist of common bond brickwork. Beneath the veranda on the southeast side of the house is an underground cylindrical brick room of unknown purpose.
3. Wall construction: painted wood siding; stick style ornamentation, entirely symmetrical except for octagonal emblem on the south face.
4. Structural system: wood frame.
5. Porches, stoops, and bulkheads: Inspired by Fowler's advice (Fowler-Stern, p. 138), an octagonal veranda surrounds the entire structure. Two symmetrically placed curvilinear wooden stairways lead to the east entrance, and one linear stairway leads to the south entrance. The crossbeams of the veranda rest on brick foundations at the outside. On the inside wall they rest on bricks, two courses thick and are not embedded in the wall. At the outer circumference of the veranda is a rail which supports a colonnade with Corinthianesque capitals. Maple leaf ornamentation occurs throughout the iron work of this railing and in the roof brackets. Moreover, a roundel containing a dog's profile appears in the center of the railing in each bay.
6. Chimneys: The house has one common bond brick chimney, located on the south side of the cupola near the center of the structure.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Double doors are located on the east bay entrance of the house. On the right panel, there are two etched glass windows, while on the left, only the upper etched glass pane remains. The glass has clef border with a bird and floral motif. Door-knobs are decorated with a helmeted antique head in profile, a motif similar to that found in the medallion on the exterior of each door. The south entrance has transparent glass panels and wooden trim. There is a pull-type doorbell to the left of the door, which may be original.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Gothic lancet side lights flank the east entrance. There are two windows in each bay of the original two stories whose spacing alternates from adjacent to separate. Storm windows on the first floor

have small vent windows in a bottom corner. All windows are double-hung.

8. Roof:

- a. The Empire Style dome is roofed with gray slate tile with a red slate cross pattern to each side of the dormer windows.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Scroll brackets on eaves of porch, second floor, and cupola. Gutter system on porch and second story with lead pipes to ground.
- c. Dormers, cupola: At the base of the dome, there are eight arched window dormers with hipped roofs. They are flanked by engaged columns with Corinthian capitals and polygonal bases. Fragments from the maple leafed ironwork which once crowned these dormers (see old view cited in Part I) now exist on the fourth floor inside the house. Above all the dormers are oculi with metal cresting. The dome is crowned by an octagonal cupola. The windows in the cupola are similar to those at the base of the dome, and have four above them.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Used for storage and mechanical equipment. A fireplace niche in the south room at this level indicates that a (laundry) kitchen was once here.
- b. First floor: There are four large rectangular rooms arranged in a cross-shape with four small triangular rooms between them. The stairhall is at the center of the plan. The entrance hall on the east is separated from the small triangular library on the southeast by a row of double doors. The triangular music room is in the northeast corner between the entrance hall and the living room on the north. The dining room is on the west side with a lavatory to the northwest and a pantry to the southwest. The kitchen is on the south side of the house.
- c. Second floor: There are six large rooms on the second floor: one on the east, one on the north, two on the west, and two on the south. The southwest room is used as a study, the remainder as bedrooms. Triangular spaces are occupied by bathrooms and closets. (See Fowler-Stern, p. 135).
- d. Third floor: The large north room served as a parlor or reception room. The south wall of that room consists

of glazed panels and double doors. There are bedrooms on the south, east, and west, and a bathroom in the southeast triangle. Other triangular spaces are divided for closets.

- e. Fourth floor: Large octagonal game room with octagonal oculi on each wall.
2. Stairways: The stairways from the basement of the fourth floor run from east to west. A circular stairway leads from the fourth floor to the cupola. The balusters and newel posts are similar on the first and second floors. On the third and fourth floors, they appear to be similar to those on lower levels, but the proportions are slightly smaller. This indicates that they are later additions.
3. Flooring: First floor has 9 centimeter strip flooring, entrance hallway has parquet pattern of 3 1/2 centimeter strips; second floor has 6 centimeter strip flooring; third floor has 6 centimeter strips in the hallway and the north room, and the remainder of the rooms have 24 centimeter strips; fourth floor has 11 centimeter strip flooring, as does the cupola.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster; first floor north room (living room) has plaster pendants; all ceilings have elaborate plasterwork medallions. Third floor reception room has wainscoting on walls; the west wall of that room has a recessment with archway. Wall boards used in the fourth floor and cupola are the same size as the floor boards (11 centimeters).
5. Doorways and doors: On the first floor, four double doors with etched glass panels and transoms lead into the southeast triangular room (library). The double doors between the north room (living room) and the west room (dining room) have glazed panels with a deer and floral motif. The initials "J.S.," etched in the glass in the double doors of the third floor reception room, are the monogram of Joseph Stiner who bought the house in 1872. A small closet door on the second floor also has an etched glass panel. All moldings and trim on the doorways are Gothic and roughly identical on the first and second floors. The third floor moldings appear similar to the others, however the proportions are changed.
6. Interior trim: Built-in chest and breakfront in first floor southwest room (pantry), built-in cabinet with painted porcelain sink in third floor reception room.
7. Hardware: Hinges and doorknobs on the first and second floor are decorative and appear to be original.

8. Mechanical and electrical equipment: Original ornamental gas fixtures can be found in basement stairwell and third floor east room. Plumbing seems to date from the turn of the century. Fowler advocated interior water closets but not in the subsidiary spaces in which they appear in this house. (Fowler-Stern, p. 137). Bathrooms, however, are placed in the triangular spaces of Wilcox's Octagon House (Bullock, pl. facing p. 317). Their placement there may have influenced that in the Armour-Stiner House. The house has a central hot air heating system. There is a brick encased Boyton's Square Pot Crusader furnace in the basement which appears to be original. There are ornamental heating grates in most rooms throughout the house, from first through fourth floor, which also are probably original. The central stairwell also acts as a heating duct. This heating system for the Octagon House was of the type which Fowler supported. (Fowler-Stern, pp. 126-128).

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. The building was originally planned as a year-round residence erected near already existing public commuter transportation (the Hudson River Railroad-ca. 1850) to New York City. That reflects similar concepts of suburbia expressed by George Woodward (pp. 11-15). Additionally, its situation some 1650 feet from the river at a height of about 140 feet above that body of water reflects Fowler's siting ideas (Fowler-Stern, pp. 14-15).
2. Outbuildings. A small octagonal summer house stands alongside the driveway. A rectangular carriage house-stable, once sited alongside the Croton Aqueduct at the eastern extremity of the property, was destroyed sometime after 1933 (Map. 5341-Survey of.....for the Estate of Delis S. Clarke). Arch-windowed wooden panels now stored under the veranda may be from that structure. A chicken coop is now located towards the southeastern boundary of the property.

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Yonkers, New York
February, 1975

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of a documentation made during January-March, 1975 by the Westchester Architectural Archive of the Hudson River Museum and funded by the New York State Council on the Arts.

The project was undertaken under the coordination of John R. Zukowsky, Architectural Archivist for the Hudson River Museum, which is under the directorship of Donald M. Hallery, Jr. James M. Addiss, led the survey team and completed measured drawings of this structure. Sue (Jui) Woo and Amy Chung, both architectural assistants from the Urban Studies Program of Briarcliff College, at Briarcliff Manor, N. Y., drew the site plan. With the assistance of data compiled by Elizabeth T. Wright, art history student at Manhattanville College in Purchase, N. Y., and Virginia Philpott, architectural assistant and Urban Studies student at Briarcliff College, John R. Zukowsky wrote the historical and architectural data sheets. Photographs were made by Thom Loughman staff photographer for the Hudson River Museum.

ADDENDUM TO
ARMOUR-STINER HOUSE
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HABS No. NY-5620

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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